

# CHAPTER-3 MAPPING DESIRES : THE QUEER IN UNDER THE UDALA TREES

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## Introduction

Inspired by Nigeria's folktales and war, *Under the Udala Trees* by Chinelo Opkarata is a deeply searching, powerful debut about the dangers of living and loving openly. The novel is set during and immediately after the Biafran war. The protagonist, Ijeoma, is a child, a bystander to those horrific days. Her father refuses on principle to hide in the family bunker and is killed in an air raid. Her mother, unable to bear this loss, collapses. Not everyone rises to heroism in hard times. Unable to care for her daughter, she sends Ijeoma to a friend in another town, a grammar-school teacher and his wife, to be used as their servant. There Ijeoma meets Amina, a girl even more adrift than herself, separated from her family in the northern part of the country. They are from different ethnic communities.

When their love is discovered, Ijeoma learns that she will have to hide this part of herself. But there is a cost to living inside a lie. Ijeoma persuades the schoolteacher to take on her new friend as a second housekeeper. From there the two girls fall into a love so young and physical, so detached from anything known to them, they might have invented it. *Udala Trees* delivers a delicate study of the competing forces that pull at Ijeoma: her gay identity, the defeat of independent Biafra, the taboo of Igbo and Hausa relationships, and Ijeoma's demotion from upper-middle class student to poor house-girl. Ijeoma comes of age as her nation does; born before independence, she is eleven when civil war breaks out in the young republic of Nigeria.

*Under the Udala trees* was published in 2015. It comes under the fiction category that gives importance to the historical war and the geographical location of Nigeria as every story has a time and a place. Traditionally, fiction includes novels, short stories, fables, legends, myths, fairy tales, epic and narrative poetry etc. However, fiction may also

encompass comic books, and many animated cartoons, films, video games, radio programs, television programs etc. *Under the Udala Trees* is a young adult novel. It is gay literature. Gay literature is a collective term for literature produced by or for the LGBT community which involves characters, plot lines, and themes portraying male homosexual behaviour. The term is now used most commonly to cover specifically gay male literature, with a separate genre of lesbian literature existing for women. Historically, the term 'gay literature' was sometimes used to cover both gay male and lesbian literatures.

There are many authors who write gay literature. But most of the times their voices are neglected by the society. It is important to bring these authors forward and celebrate them for their voices, their writing, and their participation in literature. Virginia Woolf is one of the famous writers in gay literature. Her book *Orlando*, is a book which Woolf wrote with her friend and lover Vita Sackville-West. In this book, the gender-fluid main character lives throughout several centuries as both men and women.

Larsen was also a queer writer. Although it's never been confirmed that Larsen was bi, her fiction, some of which is very obviously based on her own life, hints that she was familiar with same-sex attraction. This is super-noticeable in *Passing*, where there are a lot of pretty hot glances between the female protagonist, Irene, and her long-lost friend, Clare. Michael Cunningham's 1990 novel, *A Home at the End of the World*, made another mark in queer novel which centres on an alternative family: a gay man and his best friend plan to have a baby together, and end up letting an old college friend join in. Other famous queer authors are Rita Mae Brown, E. M. Forster, Allison Bechdel and so on.

The novel takes place in the background of the Nigerian Civil War, commonly known as the Biafran War (6 July 1967 – 15 January 1970). The war was fought between the government of Nigeria and the secessionist state of Biafra. Nigeria, which gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1960, had at that time a population of sixty million people, made up of more than three hundred differing ethnic and cultural groups. More than fifty years

earlier, the United Kingdom had carved an area out of West Africa containing hundreds of different ethnic groups and unified it, calling it Nigeria.

The three predominant groups were the Igbo, which formed between sixty to seventy percentage of the population in the southeast; the Hausa-Fulani, which formed about sixty five percentage of the peoples in the northern part of the territory; and the Yoruba, which formed about seventy five percentage of the population in the south-western part. Although these groups have their own homelands, by the 1960s the peoples were dispersed across Nigeria, with all three ethnic groups represented substantially in major cities. When the war broke out in 1967, there were still five thousand Igbo in Lagos. From 1967 to 1970, the Nigerian state of Biafra tried but failed to gain its independence in a civil war that left a million dead. Heads separated from their bodies, bodies relieved of their limbs, unforgettable starving children, pictures burned into the collective retina of the time. 1970s gave Nigeria the image of people sitting under udala trees without a home and pounded yams for supper.

Chinelo Okparanta, the author of *Under the Udala Trees* is a Nigerian-American writer who was born in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, and relocated to the United States at the age of ten. She received her BS from The Pennsylvania State University, her MA from Rutgers University, and her MFA from the University of Iowa. She was one of Granta's six New Voices for 2012 and her stories have appeared in Granta, The New Yorker, Tin House, Subtropics, and elsewhere. A Colgate University Olive B. O'Connor Fellow in Fiction as well as a recipient of the University of Iowa's Provost's Postgraduate Fellowship in Fiction, Okparanta was nominated for a US Artists Fellowship in 2012. She has been awarded additional fellowships and faculty appointments/visiting professorships at Columbia University, Purdue University, Middlebury College (Bread Loaf's John Gardner Fellow in Fiction), Howard University (Hurston/Wright Foundation Summer Writing Workshop Fiction Faculty), City College of New York, and Southern New Hampshire University. She has been awarded residencies by the Jentel Foundation, the Hermitage Foundation, the Civitella Ranieri

Foundation, the Lannan Foundation (Marfa), as well as Hedgebrook. She is currently Assistant Professor of English & Creative Writing (Fiction) at Bucknell University, where she is also C. Graydon and Mary E. Rogers Faculty Research Fellow. She is a winner of a 2014 Lambda Literary Award, a 2016 Lambda Literary Award, the 2016 Jessie Redmon Fauset Book Award in Fiction, the 2016 Inaugural Betty Berzon Emerging Writer Award from the Publishing Triangle, and a 2014 O. Henry Prize. Other honours include shortlisting for the 2017 International Dublin Literary Award, a 2017 Amelia Bloomer Project Selection (of the American Library Association), a nomination for the 2016 Zora Neale Hurston/Richard Wright Legacy Award, and a nomination for the 2016 NAACP Image Award in Fiction.

Her debut short story collection, *Happiness, Like Water*, was cited as an editors' choice in the New York Times Book Review and was named on the list of The Guardian's Best African Fiction of 2013. The book was nominated for the Nigerian Writers Award (Young Motivational Writer of the Year), longlisted for the 2013 Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award and was a finalist for the 2014 New York Public Library Young Lions Fiction Award as well as the Etisalat Prize for Literature. One of the stories in that collection, "America" recounts a transatlantic lesbian relationship, and a mother's disappointment in what she deems her daughter's choice to be gay. It also adds to Chinua Achebe's *There Was a Country* and Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* who have both found ways to reassess the Biafran conflict and the effect it had, and continues to have, on Nigerians.

Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees* uses one woman's lifetime to examine the ways in which Nigerians continue to struggle toward selfhood. Even as their nation contends with and recovers from the effects of war and division, Nigerian lives are also wrecked and lost from taboo and prejudice. This story offers a glimmer of hope - a future where a woman might just be able to shape her life around truth and love. Like Adichie in *Half of a Yellow Sun* she focuses on people whose lives were changed by the war rather than on the war itself.

Chinelo is a bold writer who expressed the ability to write about a topic that many of the writers failed to discuss and write. She lifted the veil on homosexuality with her story telling and opened a new perspective to religion while still describing sexual intimacy with such graphic detail that it will make you blush, expertly straddling the line between spirituality and sexuality. She chronicled the struggles of the LGBT in Nigeria with such emotional accuracy that it tugged at our heartstrings. She explored how people often think of homosexuality as a sexual aberration that could be ‘cured’ with prayers through deliverance and shines the light on how religious people make it almost impossible for gay people to want to love God. In the story we could see, armed with Christianity, Ijeoma’s mother assaults her daughter’s budding lesbianism with daily Bible study.

Chinelo tries to make a balance between love and war in this story. Even though the book begins in the background of Biafrian war, it ends with the present scenario that has an after effect of the war and the present religious and cultural war against same-sex couples. Style of Chinelo’s writing is understandable. The book operates in a storytelling mode, a looping reminiscence by an adult Ijeoma. A few times she even steps forward to address the reader in a confidential tone. There are few stylistic flourishes; Okparanta prefers to step aside and allow Ijeoma to plainly tell her story, giving the novel an intimate feel. She says,

There's the whole idea of the udala trees, which — the udala fruits represent female fertility. So I wanted to paint the journey of a young girl who is told to be a certain way, thinks about them, and still winds up making a more informed decision for herself.(interview)

In January 2014, Nigeria’s then president Goodluck Jonathan signed a bill commonly known as the “jail the gays” act, which criminalizes same-sex relationships. Violators face up to 14 years of prison and in the northern region, risk death by stoning. But in some countries like America gay marriage is newly legal. Udala Trees serves as a sobering reminder that despite the legality of gay marriage in much of the western hemisphere and in Europe and the

US, not too far away LGBT communities endure government-sanctioned terror and brutality. Okparanta writes that she hopes her novel will give “Nigeria’s marginalized L.G.B.T.Q. citizens a more powerful voice, and a place in our nation’s history.” And *Under the Udala Tree* tries to create a new vision in the minds of the people and the coming generations.

## Chapter-2

### Tracing the Emergence of Queer Theory

The term queer theory was introduced in 1990, with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Butler, Adrienne Rich and Diana Fuss being among its foundational proponents following the work of Michel Foucault. Before the phrase “queer theory” was born, the term “Queer Nation” appeared on the cover of the short-lived lesbian or gay quarterly *Outlook* in the winter 1991 issues. Writers Allan Be rube and Jeffrey Escoffier moved Queer Nation to embrace paradoxes in its political activism, and that the activism was taking new form and revolving around the issue of identity. Soon enough *Outlook* and *Queer Nation* stopped being published, however, there was a mini-gay renaissance going on during the 1980s and early 1990s. There were a number of significant outbursts of lesbian or gay political or cultural activity. Out of this emerged queer theory.

Teresa de Laurites, an academic and critical theorist, has been credited with coining the phrase ‘queer theory’. In 1991 she edited a special issue of the feminist cultural studies journal entitled “Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities.” In explaining her use of the term, de Laurites indicates that she means it to indicate at least three interrelated critical projects: a refusal of heterosexuality as the benchmark for all sexual formations; an attentiveness to gender capable of interrogating the frequent assumption that lesbian and gay studies is a single, homogeneous object; and an insistence on the multiple ways in which race crucially shapes sexual subjectivities.

Queer theory is a field of post-structuralist critical theory that emerged in the early

1990s out of the fields of queer studies and women’s studies. Since the early 1990s, the

term 'queer' has been strategically taken up to signify a wide-ranging and unmethodical resistance to normative models of sex, gender, and sexuality. Although this use of queer marks a process of resignification as new meanings and values are associated with what was once a term of homophobic abuse, there is always an important sense in which queer maintains, even in changed illocutionary circumstances, its original charge of shame. Despite such a short history, the accelerated rise of queer as a critical term demonstrates the significant impact it has had on understandings of the cultural formations of gendered and sexual identities and practices, both in activist and academic circles. The term queer is used differently in different circumstances. Sometimes queer is synonymous with lesbian and gay, for which it becomes a convenient shorthand. At other times, it refers to a generational or even fashion-led distinction between old-style lesbians and gays and new-style sexual outlaws. In recent years, queer theory has become one of the most popular fields for graduate students in English literature. Once on the fringes of academic life, it was a major topic at last month's meeting of the Modern Language Association in Toronto, and today Ivy League English departments are recruiting queer theorists.

Queer theory's origin is hard to clearly define, since it came from multiple critical and cultural contexts, including feminism, post-structuralism, radical movements of people of colour, the gay and lesbian movements, AIDS activism, many sexual subcultural practices such as sadomasochism, and post colonialism. Although queer theory had its beginnings in the educational sphere, the cultural events surrounding its origin also had a huge impact.

Queer theory as an academic tool came about in part from gender and sexuality studies that in turn had their origins from lesbians and gay studies and feminist theory. It is a much newer theory, in that it was established in the 1990s, and contests many of the set ideas of the more established fields it comes from by challenging the notion of defined and finite identity categories, as well as the norms that create a binary of good versus bad sexualities. Before queer theory there were two genders, also known as 'sexes': men and women. Sometimes, they

liked to battle. And history was written according to themes men cared about- land, political struggles, exploration, and settlement- from an entirely male perspective. When feminism hit, women pushed to expand the roles they were ‘allowed’ to play in society, and have their voices heard. But, in some people’s views, feminism also made the case that all men were aggressive. And that sex was always violent and that if women ran the world, we’d all be better off. The more rigid these definitions of ‘the masculine’ and ‘the feminine’ became, and the more the battle of the sexes raged on, the more excited queer theorists became to step in and challenge those categories.

One definition of “queer” is someone who moves *between* the identities defined by patriarchy and essentialist categories of femininity- someone who always questions who gets to define what the facts are in any argument. Queerness has been mostly affected with bisexual, lesbian, and gay subjects, but its analytic framework also includes such topics as cross-dressing, intersex bodies and identities, gender ambiguity and gender-corrective surgery. Queer theory examines the discourses of homosexuality developed in the last century in order to place the ‘queer’ into historical context, deconstructing contemporary arguments both for and against this latest terminology.

Queer theory is largely derived from post-structuralist theory and deconstruction theory in particular. Starting in the 1970s, a range of authors brought deconstructionist critical approaches to bear on issues of sexual identity, and especially on the construction of a normative ‘straight’ ideology. Queer theorists challenged the validity and consistency of the discourse regarding heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is a form of power and control that applies pressure to both straight and gay individuals, through institutional arrangements and accepted social norms. In an important essay of 1980, “Compulsive Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” Adrienne Rich posited what she called ‘lesbian continuum’ as a way of stressing how far-ranging and diverse is the spectrum of love and bonding among women, including female friendship, the family relationship between mother and daughter, and

women's partnerships and social groups as well as a same-sex relationships. Later theorists such as Eve Sedgwick and Judith Butler undertook to invert the standard hierarchical opposition by which homosexuality is marginalized and made unnatural, by stressing the extent to which heterosexuality is based on the suppression and denial of same-sex desires and relationships.

Queer theory is mainly coming under the genre Gender Studies. It also includes gender, gay and lesbian criticism with feminism too. Gender studies are interdisciplinary in both its roots and its methods giving rise to other streams of literary and cultural theory, sociology, anthropology and psychoanalysis. It examines oppressive history of lesbians, gay, and other erotic groups, the formation and representation of gender, as well as gender as a category of analysis of literature and culture, and the intersection of gender with division of race, class, and color. But more clearly queer theory is more clearly emphasized sexuality rather than gender in the formation of identity. It is important to understand that queer theory is not more about understanding the binary of homosexual and heterosexual.

Lee Edelman's *Homographesis* (1994) deconstructed the notion of gay identity. Much queer theory, such as Simon Watney's *Policing Desire* (1987) and Donna Haraway's "The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies" (1989), attempted to analyze the AIDS epidemic in the late 1980s and its presentation in the media. Other queer theorists such as Michael Moon drew attention to the 'queer' attributes of what presumed to be sexual normality.

Annamarie Jagose wrote *Queer Theory: An Introduction* in 1997. Queer used to be a slang word for homosexuals and was used for homophobic abuse. Recently, this term has been used as an umbrella term for a coalition of sexual identities that are culturally marginalized, and at other times, to create discourse surrounding the budding theoretical model that primarily arose through more traditional lesbian and gay studies. According to Jagose,

Queer focuses on mismatches between sex, gender and desire. For most, queer

has been prominently associated with those who identify as lesbian and gay.

Unknown to many, queer is in association with more than just gay and lesbian, but also cross-dressing, hermaphroditism, gender ambiguity and gender-corrective surgery.(2)

Queer theory is not predominantly about analyzing the binary of the homosexual and heterosexual. There is an abundance of identities in which Queer theory not only recognizes but also breaks down in relation to other contributing factors like race, class, religion, etc.

Queer theory was originally associated with radical gay politics and other groups which embraced 'queer' as an identity label that pointed to a separatist, non-assimilationist politics. Queer theory developed out of an examination of perceived limitations in the traditional identity politics of recognition and self-identity. In particular, queer theorists identified processes of consolidation or stabilization around some other identity labels (e.g. gay and lesbian); and construed queerness so as to resist this. Queer theory attempts to maintain a critique more than define a specific identity. These critiques are expressed through a whole range of notions in subfields such as Eco technics within technology studies. Queer theorists focuses on the problems related in classifying an individual as male or female, mostly on biological basis. For example, if the sex chromosomes X and Y come into a combination of XXY and it creates a distinctive sex. And it leads for the emergence of intersex. Scientists who have written on the conceptual significance of intersex individuals include Anne Fausto-Sterling, Katrina Karkazis, Rebecca Jordan-Young, and Joan Roughgarden. While the medical literature focuses increasingly on genetics of intersex traits, and even their deselection, some scholars on the study of culture, such as Barbara Rogoff, argue that the traditional distinction between biology and culture as independent entities is overly simplistic, pointing to the ways in which biology and culture interact with one another.

Richard Norton suggests that the existence of queer language is believed to have evolved from the imposing of structures and labels from an external mainstream culture. It was due to the proper usage of language that queer theory received its prominence in the society.

Michel Foucault writes in "The History of Sexuality", critiquing the idea of the 'repressive hypothesis' that supposes from the 17th to the mid-20th century, sex was a private matter limited within a marriage between a husband and wife, and discourses of sex have been otherwise prohibited and repressed. As a result of this repression, people sought outlets to release sexual feelings, building their own discourses of sex and thus liberating themselves from the confines of a sexually repressive society. Yet, Foucault argues that the repressive hypothesis is a limiting attempt to connect open discourses of sex to personal liberation. This sort of narrative which views discourses of sex as revolutionary progress against a repressive system is dependent on the assumption that people of the past were sexually repressed; however, Foucault states that from the 17th to the mid-20th century the 'repressive hypothesis' was an illusion, rather a suppression of western society's sexuality.

In fact, discourse about sexuality flourished during this time period. Queer theory, which Ms. Sedgwick developed along with Judith Butler, a professor at the University of California, Berkley, is a prism through which scholars examine literary texts. Queer theorists scorn traditional definitions of 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual'. There is no strict demarcation between male and female, they argue. Instead, queer theorists say, taking their cue from the historian Michel Foucault, sexuality exists on a continuum, with some people preferring sex partners of the opposite sex, others preferring partners of both sexes. Only since the 19th century, queer theorists argue, have sexual definitions become rigid. And along with this rigidity, they say, it has come with anxiety, panic and intensifying homophobic attitudes.

Queer theorists have been prominent advocates of a post-identitarian political rationality. They always debate on the identity of the lesbians or the gay. Queer theory is also related to feminism. Feminism gives queer theory a base aside.

### Chapter-3

*Under the Udala Trees* tells the story of a young girl Ijeoma who had to face many problems in her life and was the victim of the horrific days of war. Ojoto was the place where the protagonist of the story lived. They were from the Igbo tribes who lived in their traditions and culture. The novel starts with a colorful atmosphere. The children run after the butterflies and the seasons were all normal as per the cycle of nature. But everything changes when the shadow of war hits Ojoto. It was during 1967 the war began. And by 1968 the whole Ojoto was covered in the darkness of the war. The war uproots everyone. Children roam in the streets with 'begging bowls' and starving bellies. Babies are orphaned, wives are widowed, people return from bunkers to find their homes destroyed, windows blown up and the beloved ones being killed.

By 1968 the men of Ojoto had begun slinging guns across their shoulders and started chanting 'Biafra wins the war'. And it was during this period that Ijeoma was sent off by her mother to a grammar school teacher and his wife, to be used as their servant. The story is actually narrated by Ijeoma herself in a story telling mode. It is as if she wanted to make the readers know why was she sent off and about how she met Amina, a girl even more adrift than herself, separated from her family in the northern part of the family. She tells that if she had not met Amina then there would be no story. So Ijeoma tells that the story begins even before the real story begins.

The story is centred in the Christian belief that has six parts in total which it consists of seventy seven chapters. The author has embedded with beautifully capturing sights of Nigeria that the readers could feel the place. Characterization of the novel is also very attractive. The novel does not has a large cast, primarily it revolves around Ijeoma, her mother, and Ijeoma's lovers. One of the features of this novel is that the author has regularly used the tribe language in the conversations in the novel. The name Ijeoma is first seen in the fourth chapter. After the war the children were denied of their education. And more than that it was the mental and the physical problems they had to face including Ijeoma.

Things turns upside down after the death of Ijeoma's father Uzo, "a man who liked to wallow in thoughts"(okparanta 7). After Uzo's death things were very different with Ijeoma's life. Her mother was very uncomfortable with her. Adaora survives the aftermath physically, but not psychologically. For her Ijeoma was a burden like the war and the thoughts about her husband. She felt angry with Uzo for leaving them alone. She really missed her husband and she dreamt about him, and always felt his presence near her. So she just wanted to leave from that weird place.

Once when the soldiers came asking for water she refused to give them water since she thought that it was the war that killed her husband. But Ijeoma was so kind of their begging and she took some water for the soldiers. Watching this she scolded her to not give them water. And with this incident she was not able to tolerate Ijeoma and planned to leave her to Nnewi with a former friend of her father, a grammar school teacher and his wife. And Adaora was planning to go to Aba.

Ijeoma begged Adaora not to send her away from her. But she told Ijeoma that it was just for a few days and if the situation in Aba was fine then she would take Ijeoma along with her and until then she had to stay at Nnewi. Food was also a reason for Adaora's planning of sending off Ijeoma. Nigeria did not allow the Red Cross groups to help Biafra during the war even though the people waited outside for the relief lorry to bring food supplies. And they were starving due to lack of food. Ijeoma had already lost her father and she does not want to lose her mother too. She pleaded to Adaora to not send her off but Adaora was determined with her decision for Ijeoma's safety. And on the day when they were leaving the church was destroyed and all the way there were soldiers marching chanting the words for the victory of Biafra.

And after reaching Nnewi it is a heart breaking moment for both Adaora and Ijeoma to be separated. But their situation does not allow them to be together. Adaora wanted her daughter to get educated and be well off. So Ijeoma is finally at Nnewi at the grammar teacher's house. And she starts to adjust with her new life in the hovel at Nnewi with the

teacher and his wife. And she works as their house girl and in return she is provided with education, food and clothing. Ijeoma's mother does not visit her for a year and half. But a feeling of demotion had affected Ijeoma from an upper middle class family to a servant girl. But she started to adjust with the situations day by day.

One day after returning home from the market, she is followed by a girl in a tattered green pinafore and hair in long clumps. Ijeoma takes her home to be fed. The teacher and his wife were far from welcoming but they allow her to stay with them as they come to know that she had no place to go. She is of Ijeoma's same age and was from the Hausa community. They both start to live together with the school teacher and his family. And they attended the same school and were always together all the time. Now, the pace of the story starts to change. Both the girls feel very comfortable with each other's presence. "Between true friends even water drunk together is sweet"(56). The relationship of the girls begins to grow and they become very close friends. But later on that relationship started to grow even more intense. Amina and Ijeoma had an extreme level of friendship that they were in a stage and found it very difficult to be separated from each other. Even they might not have thought about being in such a relationship. They were indulging in a lesbian relationship and even came into a sexual relationship. "Maybe love was some combination of friendship and infatuation. A deeply felt affection accompanied by a certain sort of awe"(182)

This clearly depicts the desire of Ijeoma and Amina to be together and live forever. For Ijeoma it is confusion whether the relationship with Amina was an infatuation or a strong friendship. Both the girls feel a kind of attraction to each other's body as they became close to each other. They both end up in a strong bond that even leads to sexual relationship.

"This was the beginning, our bodies being touched by fire that was each other's flesh...Tingly and good and like everything perfect in the world"(152).For Ijeoma, Amina was her everything and it was same for Amina. Her physical appearance was very much attractive to each other.

If you set off on a witch-hunt, you will find a witch. When you find her, she will be dressed like any other person. But to you, her skin will glow in stripes of white and black. You will see her broom, and you will hear her witch-cry and you will feel the effects of her spells on you. No matter how unlike a witch she is, there she will be a witch before your eyes. (189)

All others feel that this relationship is awkward. Her mother tells her that only she feels this kind of emotion towards the girl. And whatever she sees in that girl, Ijeoma feels it as so precious. The school teacher finds the relationship among the girls and he calls for Ijeoma's mother. Adaora comes to the school teacher knowing everything. And she takes back Ijeoma along with her. Adaora wants Ijeoma to completely forget about her Amina. But it killed Ijeoma very much.

The absence of any kind of communication from her was not at all like an absence. It was instead a presence: of mind-pain, like a thick, rusted arrow shooting straight into my head poisoning my mind with something like tetanus, causing my thoughts to go haywire, a spam here, a spam there.(193)

Ijeoma is not able to forget Amina. She was not even allowed to communicate with Amina. And Ijeoma's mother never wants her daughter to lead the old life with Amina. So she restricted Ijeoma from having any kind of communication with her. But for Ijeoma a life without Amina was very tough. Her mind was very heavy with her emotions and thoughts about Amina. But to avoid hurting her mother she tries not to communicate with Amina. She tried to find reasons that could support their relationship and wanted to justify that she could not remain separated from Amina

Also, what if Adam and Eve merely symbols of companionship? And Eve, different from him, woman instead of man, was simply a tool by which God noted that companionship was something you got from a person outside yourself? What if that's all it was? And why not?(208)

Adaora also tried a means to change Ijeoma through a religious manner. In this book Bible also has a great relevance. She is a firm Christian believer. Armed with Christianity, she assaults her daughter's budding lesbianism with daily Bible study. From Leviticus, Mark, Romans, she tells all the examples that she thinks will be persuasive. She taught her that lesbian relationship was a sin and God will punish such people. She tells a story from the Book of Judges in which a group of rowdy village men descend on a Levite and his betrothed, intent on raping him. She said that God has made Adam and Eve as man and women and made them live together and prosper in generations and lead good families.

But Ijeoma started to question her mother's Bible lessons, her pastor's sermons and the supposed truths of heterosexual human and godly love.

I went down the aisle to the front of the church, as I had the time before. I knelt down before God. I would have prayed, but somehow I could not find the words to do so...Not a single word to express myself, not one single word to apologize and beg forgiveness for my sins.(234)

Ijeoma is not willing to accept the Christian belief that was breaking her relationship. She has no feelings for the religious studies.

Then a twist happens in the story when Amina gets married to another man. Amina deserts Ijeoma after experiencing a vivid nightmare. She believes that the nightmare will be true. This shows the superstitious element in the story that had made the story turn its root. Ijeoma is completely devastated with this news. She was very much attached with the relationship. And she was under great depression. All throughout her life it was only losses that she had gained. At first she lost her father with the war, later she was forced to move away from her mother for a new start. But there she meets Amina and gets into a relation and at last the love story ends up in a tragedy where she is brought back to her mother. And she is not able to lead a happy life. And now she has lost Amina completely when she is married to another man.

But we were in love, or at least I believed myself completely to be. I craved [her] presence for no other reason than to have it. It was certainly friendship too. This intimate companionship with someone who knew me in a way that no one else did. It was a heightened state of friendship. Maybe it was some also a bit of infatuation. But what I knew for sure was that it was also love. Maybe love was some combination of friendship and infatuation. A deeply felt affection accompanied by a certain sort of awe. And by gratitude. And by a desire for a lifetime of togetherness.(182)

She had an extreme emotion of love towards Amina that made her to think that she wanted to live with her rest of the lifetime. “I love her so much that sometimes I am weak with love”(292). She felt like no use of living her rest of the life. She felt everything completely out after knowing that Amina was married to another man. “I had become a little like a coffin: I felt a hollowness in me and a rattling at my seams”(304). She was in a difficult stage to adjust with the situation. And this emotion led Ijeoma feel love for another woman, Ndidi, a school teacher. And she engages in a secret relationship and she turns out to be a complete lesbian. One night, she and other women are forced to run from a speakeasy where they have attempted to meet freely. And, some hours later, they come out of hiding; they find that one of them has been burned to death.

Ijeoma is forced to question her own nature because of the pressures from those around her. It is a common feeling for any closeted person to at some point think like her: “I did want to be normal. I did want to lead a normal life. I did want to have a life where I did not have to constantly worry about being found out.” This inevitably leads to bitter compromises. Ijeoma marries her childhood friend, Chibundu. He finds his own reasons for resenting his wife, spying on her, and raping her repeatedly. But even though she tries to be a happy and good wife to him, she fails. Thinking about her mother she tries to stick on with any horrible situation with her husband. But as time passes, Ijeoma is contending with her feeling for the

lesbian relationship, which she must keep as a secret and finally makes a fateful decision and she does allow her to explore her natural feelings.

### Conclusion

The study seeks to analyse the lesbian nature of an igbo tribal girl Ijeoma. The protagonist Ijeoma herself is narrating the story at an older age about her childhood and her homosexual character. At first she meets Amina. Amina is also a girl who suffers the consequences of the Biafran war like Ijeoma. It was thus she brought Amina to the school teacher's home. And the school teacher allows Amina to stay with them. At first it was just a kind of friendship between the girls. But as they came to know each other more, the intensity of their relationship started to grow more. This leads them into a sexual relationship.

Later Ijeoma is taken back by her mother when the teacher informs Adaora about the relationship between the girls. She was guided by her mother with Christian beliefs and was told that homosexuality was a sin. At first her mother shows a kind of resistance to whatever Ijeoma tells because Ijeoma did not believe in her teachings. For Ijeoma, homosexual feeling is not only felt to Amina alone. When Amina was married to another man she was completely lost. To cope up with the feelings she feels a kind of sexual feeling to a local teacher, Ndidi. But she keeps it as a secret. Since Adaora does not want Ijeoma to continue the lesbian relationship she forces Ijeoma to get married. And then she is married to a man who was one of her childhood friend.

Ijeoma thinks about Ndidi even after she has moved on with the life after her marriage. And she tries to live a normal life but she is taken away by the thoughts of her relationship and is not able to live normally. She thinks about the days that she had spent with Ndidi. It is the

Christian belief and love for her mother that drifts her away from her relationship and she tries to be a good wife of Chibundu. But she moves out for her true feelings.

The author has made a clear and beautiful narration throughout the novel from the perspective of the character herself. This novel depicts that it is the true feeling of a person that should dominate and be expressed whatever the circumstances be. The novel has given importance to many themes like war, love, faith, culture and many more. *Under the Udala Trees* is thus a powerful novel that raises voice for the people who are asked to subdue their true feelings and lead their life as the society decides. And the author has succeeded by writing the unwritten.